CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

FROM time to time in this department there has been discussion, provoked by the appearance of this or that volume of reminiscences, of various aspects of the literary London of the nineties. Katherine Tynan, in the course of "The Wandering Years," recently published by the Houghton, Mifflin Company, dismisses the period scathingly, finding the political talk of the present more wholesome and breezy than the literary shop talk of the past. "It used to be in a special way shop talk," she says. "The nineties had given me a surfeit of it; prices per thousand and biggest circulations, and all the crowded rooms shrieking like the parrot houses at the zoo, and the gist of it the making of books and the prices to be obtained for them. Flesh and blood was only matter for books, and the veins of these literary men and women ran ink instead of blood. I am not saying, of course, that there were not people who loved literature for its own sake: I am only talking of literary criticism of the nineties, and the queer, unpleasant things that came out of it."

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IN 1920 Katherine Tynan paid a visit to the Dunsanys. Dunsany had just returned from America and was enthusiastic about the country. "It was the last country in the world one would have expected him to be enthusiastic about if he had not visited it. But apparently the Americans know how to welcome and speed their honored guests as we do not, and despite some little difficulties it had been roses, roses all the way for the Dunsanys. At the moment their late distinguished guest held the Americans to be *the* people of the world. The memory of how the Americans had honored art and literature made him intolerant of his comfortable neighbors, to the mass of whom such things would count for nothing. The country of rich grazing lands and rich graziers would have cared as little for 'Bainting and Boedry' as the first Hanoverian King of England. Lord Dunsany was out to avenge Keats on the country of Francis Ledwidge and himself, moved thereto by the memory of how America honored the distinguished stranger."

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"A. E." (George William Russell) appears many times in the course of "The Wandering Years," and he is also the subject of a chapter in St. John G. Ervine's "Some Impressions of My Elders" (the Macmillan Company). When he was in America Mr. Ervine was impressed by the number of Americans who asked him to tell them something of "A. E." It was Sir Horace Plunkett, Mr. Ervine tells us, who, returning from a long stay in the United States to begin the cooperative movement, found, in a Dublin shop, keeping accounts for a tea merchant, a poet and a painter mystic, who was also an economist, with the capacity, as it afterward proved, to become the ablest journalist in Ireland. "This man of multiple energies was George William Russell, who was born in Lurgan, in the county of Armagh, on April 10, 1867. He is two years younger than Mr. Yeats, eleven years younger than Mr. Shaw and fifteen years younger than Mr. Moore."

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"THE order of these births is significant," says Mr. Ervine. "Observe how an aloof artist has been succeeded by a furious economist! Mr. Moore, who began life as a realist after the manner, but not after the style, of Zola, and then turned his back on Zola and sought the company of Turgeniev so that he might pursue apt and beautiful words and delicate and elusive thoughts, was followed by Mr. Shaw, who began by filling his mind with the ideas of Henry George and Karl Marx, and then turned his back on both of them in order that he might consort with Mr. Sidney Webb. Mr. Yeats, with his vague poetry and vague mysticism—none the less vague because of the curious care for exactness which causes him to count the nine and fifty swans at Coole and the nine bean rows on Innisfree—followed Mr. Shaw, and in turn was followed by 'A. E.' so closely connected with economics that some wag, when asked what was the meaning of 'A. E.'s' pen name, replied 'agricultural economist.'"

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WITHOUT banter, where does the "A. E." come from? Mr. Darrell Figgis, in his book on "A. E.," explained the pen name thus: "Wanting at one time a new pen name he subscribed himself as Aeon. His penmanship not at all times being of the legiblest, the printer deciphered the first diphthong and set a query for the rest, whereupon the writer, in his proof sheets, stroked out the query and stood by the diphthong." Eventually the diphthong was abandoned in favor of the two separate letters. Reverting to Mr. Ervine's linking of "A. E." with the names of Moore, Shaw and Yeats, the chapter under discussion goes on to say: "Mr. Shaw likes to think of himself as an economist, but he is more than an economist; he is John the Baptist pretending to be Karl Marx. 'A. E.' likes to think of himself as an expert on the price of butter and milk and cows and sheep, but he is more than an expert on these things; he is Blake pretending to be Sir Horace Plunkett, or Walt Whitman pretending to be President Wilson."

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GEORGE BERNARD SHAW too has a chapter by himself in Mr. Ervine's book. If you are willing to agree with Mr. Ervine, G. B. S., instead of being the "josher" with an abnormal craving for publicity that most people think him, is really a shy and nervous man. Says Mr. Ervine: "He is a Don Quixote without illusions. When he tilts at windmills he does so because they are *windmills* in private ownership, and he wishes them to be driven by electricity and owned by the local authority. In print and on platforms Mr. Shaw brags and boasts and lays claim to an omniscience that would scandalize most deities, but no one who has the ability to distinguish between sincerity and mere capering is in the least deceived by his platform conceit. He is one of the very few men in the world who can brag in public without being offensive to his audience. He can even insult his audience without hurting its feelings."

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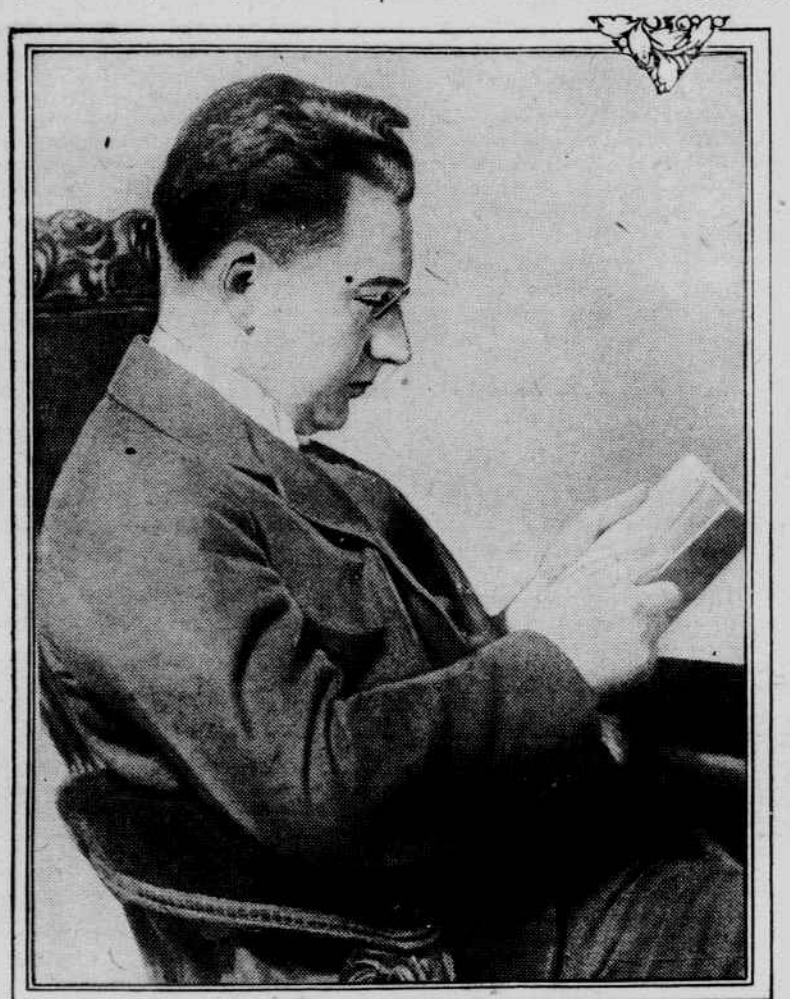
FROM Mr. Ervine's portrait of H. G. Wells the reader takes an impression of an energy that suggests the adjective incorrigible. "I doubt," says Mr. Ervine, "whether Mr. Wells suffers from fatigue at all or to any serious extent. He takes few if any holidays, plays games very assiduously, and is unhappy if he has not got some work on hand. He begins to write a new book immediately he has completed its predecessor, having no belief seemingly in fallow time. When he is not working or playing he is talking. His conversation has a curious resemblance in its shape, if I may use that word, to the style of his writing. One listens for the suspended sentence, for the dots with which, in his prose, he breaks a thought so that the reader himself may complete it."



St. John Ervine.

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MR. HENRY JUSTIN SMITH concludes his preface to Ben Hecht's "A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago" (Covici-McGee) with the suggestion that the book may succeed "so well that Mr. Hecht will hear some brazen idiots remarking: 'I like it better than "Erik Dorn" or "Gargoyles."'" Mr. Smith's suggestion is entirely sound. It is the opinion of one such "brazen idiot" right here that "A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago" is worth "Dorn" and "Gargoyles" together, with the abominable "Fantazius Mallare" of short life and unsavory memory thrown in for good measure. The sketches that make up "A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago" represent not blatancy or pose but hard work. They are the expression of a genuine talent. There are bits here and there of which Guy de Maupassant would not have been ashamed, and if Mr. Hecht were a respectful young man, which he very likely is not, his hat would be humbly and reverently off at this association of names.

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IN writing the first page of "Gargoyles" Mr. Hecht may have had in mind the same establishment that he describes here in the sketch "Queen Bess' Feast." Yet the beginning of "Gargoyles" is as artificial and inartistic as it is ugly, whereas in "Queen Bess' Feast" the author has succeeded in creating a picture with the fewest possible strokes. More than that he has stimulated the imagination of the reader to the point where the reader himself, without knowing it, fills in the picture. For a brief moment Queen Bess is as real as the *patronne* of "La Maison Tellier," and of the fifteen girls who troop in to the Thanksgiving dinner dressed in simple afternoon frocks, and with neither rouge nor beads on them, we feel that we know the life stories, just as we knew the life stories of the bevy of women, who, in the French story, made that journey in order to be present at a little girl's first communion. It is only the mind tainted or unhealthy that finds immoral either "La Maison Tellier" or "Queen Bess' Feast."

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ALSO suggesting Maupassant, but the Maupassant of a very different vein, is "Mishkin's Minyon." That is pure *genre*, in the style of the great French story teller's ironic and comical *croquis*, as one might call them, illuminating the avarice of the Norman peasant. In "A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago" there are also echoes of other writers besides Guy de Maupassant. "The Dagger Venus," for example, is Leonard Merrick, the Leonard Merrick, let us say, of "The Suicides of the Rue Sombre." In thus going back through Mr. Hecht's sketches for possible molding influences there is no thought of disparagement. Without qualification be it said here is first rate work. It is just that that irritates. A man with such gifts of humor and pathos as Mr. Hecht has shown in this volume of sketches has no right in the muck; no justification for trying to rewrite "The Adventures of Fanny Hill" with a Wabash avenue, Chicago, twist.

Authors' Works And Their Ways

Jesse W. Weik, in his "The Real Lincoln," which Houghton Mifflin Company have just published, gives a number of intimate memories and little known views of the great President. The book shows that Lincoln was susceptible to feminine charms, referring to proposals of marriage he made to Ann Rutledge, and after her death to Mary Owens and Sarah Richard. After they had declined his offer he proposed and was accepted by Mary Todd. In paying court to Miss Richard the author was told by that lady that Mr. Lincoln was "delicate and attentive to the point of gallantry; made her several beautiful presents. . . . and. . . . in pressing his suit urged that because the Sarah of Bible times became the wife of Abraham, therefore she, Sarah Richard, in view of that precedent, was foreordained to marry Abraham Lincoln."

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Sir James Barrie's play "Dear Brutus," which was produced in America several years ago, has just been published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

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Hamlin Garland started West on his lecture tour recently, accompanied by his nineteen-year-old daughter, Mary Isabel, who will share the lecture platform with him. Mr. Garland's first stop will be in and around Chicago, where he will address State normal schools and colleges, returning East for a short time before he begins his nationwide tour.

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Wilfrid Ewart, the English writer, author of "Way of Revelation," is now in New Mexico, where he is in the company of Stephen Graham. His visits to the festival dances of the Pueblo Indians and to the Grand Canyon offer much to occupy his time. Mr. Ewart's most recent book is "A Journey in Ireland," published by the Appletons.

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Tongue-twisting titles are as bad as tongue-twisting words; the Harvard University Press has been forced to recognize Kirsopp Lake's "Immortality and the Modern Mind" under various disguises such as "The Immortality of the Model Mind" and "Immorality of the Modern Man."